Saturday, January 24, 1976

Dear Mom and Dad,

What a voyage it has been! It seems relatively impossible that I have seen what I have, but I guess it is true!

How did this journey come into being? About seven weeks ago, after I had spoken with you on the telephone, I could not help but feel a bit guilty, as I had indeed done very little travelling. It had almost been a full year since I had last taken a vacation and I fear the expanses of time were taking their toll on me. For, I was in a rather proverbial dilemma as my patience was wearing a bit thin with the constant problems in the office. "So," I said to myself, "a vacation is needed!" Of course, I could only think of the event in June, so now seemed like a rather opportune time to take a holiday (maybe 1976 will not be such a bad year after all!).

Of course, there is always the last moment anxieties that accompany the planning of a vacation. As I had stated earlier, I thought I could not leave as the Disbursing Office was in utter chaos yet, having worked rather diligently the Saturday before I was to embark, a bit of organization was restored and I

could leave the office with a sense of complacency that in fact everything was in order.

So, come Sunday the eleventh, I am in my usual form before any vacation. You know me, excited as a little boy. This excitement would turn into a bit of anxiety as I had a problem getting a taxi. Upon my repeated inquiries, the German operator kept giving me a number for the time of day. (AO2-0111, is that not Akron's number for the time of day?). How exasperating that was! Fortunately, I finally contacted the company and a taxi was there within minutes. (All my telephone calls are made from a telephone booth. The cost of installing a telephone is rather prohibitive, so I have decided against it.)

Now, the "waiting game" began as the train for Frankfurt left, to my dismay, three hours later than I thought. To make the matter more chilling, the station was closed and there I am sitting alone on a wooden bench on the outside platform. What an essay that would make! Ah yes, "Just Me and the Station!"

By 3:10 A.M., the Frankfurt train pulls in to pick up a lone American. Despite

the wait, I learned that silence is like gold, as it is very rare to find it.

The morning work hours come early at the Frankfurt Railroad Station as by 4:20 A.M. the station is bustling with activity. Unfortunately, I am not bustling as I am a trifle bit tired. But, my tired nature is soon terminated as over the loudspeaker the announcement for the Vienna-London Express is made all aboard! (Unfortunately I do not know how to say that in German, but I am sure in Italian it would be "alla Boarda!")

Monday dawned rather cloudy as the train pulled away and I suppose the grayness of the day was a reflection of my spirit. alas, I was a trifle bit anxious as to what I would expect in this city called London

Clickity-clank seemed to be the sound of the day. But after so many years, my fondest dream had finally come true as at last I was on a train equipped with dining and sleeping facilities. "Unbelievable!" was all I could think as I sat down for lunch.

So, I was expecting a rather mundane ride to the coast of Belgium when, to my surprise, I look to my right and see the tallest hills rising out of the depths of the Rhine River! "Why, of course," I said to myself, "I remember seeing a similar train when I was travelling with the

"Bonn almost four years ago!"
So and behold my intuition was correct as the train passed the restaurant where we had stopped one Sunday years ago.

Of course, it goes without saying that the scenery along the Rhine River was beautiful! It reminded me a great deal of the Ohio River Valley.

From the Rhine Valley, the express continued at quite a rapid pace! Through Bonn, Cologne, Aachen, Liege, and onward through Brussels the train continued. It was at the Brussels station where I came in contact with an amazing American young lady. She was wealthy, no doubt, as she was attending school in England and in between terms, she was travelling throughout Europe. What was of particular intrigue was the fact that she was from Washington, D.C., and a Republican, which was something she made a point of mentioning to me.

After a few more hours which were interlaced with some very interesting conversations, the train arrived at Ostend where a very large water craft would be transporting us across the vast expanses of the English Channel.

The weather was relatively clear, although as one looked out across the

English Channel, there were many clouds looming on the horizon. The darkness on the horizon was a prelude to the interesting moments that were yet to come.

So, there I was absorbing the warm winter breeze, and the last semblance of sunshine when the whistle sounded and the ferry prepared to set "sail" for a land unknown to me.

The wind was howling and the waves were breaking with quite a bit of force against the bow of the ship. I could only feel sorry for anyone suffering from sea sickness as the motions of the ship would certainly not help matters. Despite the motions of the ship, I ventured out onto the side deck only to be met by a gale force wind. How invigorating! I looked to both sides and saw many freighters anchored for the night as I imagine sea conditions were too rough to continue a voyage during the night. Despite the sea conditions, there was one lone hovercraft "skating" along the water. The hovercraft seemed quite aloof from the troubled waters below as it "skated" on a layer of air above the turbulent seas.

After a four hour journey, the ferry had arrived at Dover Marina. Not too soon, as

I was very happy to put my feet on land once again.

Through customs and to the train I went! I sat down and began thinking. Well, my thoughts were interrupted when a young man from Northern Ireland, a young lady from Belgium and one from France sat down in the compartment. Of course, I would not know until later that the young man was from Northern Ireland as he was speaking very fluent French. In any event, I made the blunder of making a comment when the French woman said, "Fish and chips: non tres bien!" Of course, I knew from previous teachings that the French have their own words for fish and french fries. So I said rather nonchantly, "you do not like fish and chips?" and she said that they are too greasy!

So, the ice had been broken and I found out that the woman from France was studying to become an English teacher in France. As for the other two; well, they were mere drifters travelling throughout Europe looking for a good time.

By now, darkness had descended over the United Kingdom and I was resigned to the fact that I would not see much of anything until the morning. So,

I settled back content to listen to the babbling of those French-speaking persons.

Before long, the train had arrived at Victoria Station. Upon my arrival, I hailed a taxi whereby the taxi driver says, "What will it be 'governor'?" Ha! This was my prelude to England!

After a very frightening taxi ride (their drivers (taxi) are worse than New York City cab drivers as I actually saw a taxi hit a lady!), I made my way to the Consul Hotel which was across the street from Kensington Gardens near the famed Marble Arch.

The next nine days were rather jumbled together as there was quite a bit to accomplish!

On the next day, sunshine had broken through the early morning mist. Would you believe there were flowers blooming as well as dog-wood trees?

After a quick breakfast, it was off to Piccadilly Circus to catch the "around London Tour" which was conducted on a double decker bus. Fortunately (an unusual term for a dilemma, but a true word!), I got lost and ended up at Trafalgar

Square. What a view it was to look down Constitution Hill Avenue and see "Big Ben," and the halls of Parliament.

From Trafalgar Square, I walked to Piccadilly Circus to board the bus! Gracious London is certainly a large city!

Now, what were the highlights of the holiday?

St Paul's Cathedral and Sunday church services there. — Sir Christopher Wren certainly had quite an imagination to make up the plans for this cathedral!

Parliament — This deserves a special comment as I was somewhat amazed to see the relaxed nature of the sessions! You could say that a Member of Parliament can be quite rude, especially when an opposition member has something to say! Additionally, when Prime minister Wilson came into the hall, he sat down and promptly propped his feet on the adjacent podium. I could not help but think that this relaxed atmosphere certainly helps to promote English parliamentarian's role as human beings, too!

Now then, permit me to move across the Thames River to the Royal Festival Concert Hall where I attended a concert

performed by the London Symphony Orchestra. What one word would describe the performance Exquisite! It had been so long since I had attended a symphony, that my eyes welled with tears as the music was played. I suppose that is something that is not supposed to happen to a man in the United States army, but I was really impressed by the performance!

Of course, any trip to London would be incomplete without viewing the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace! The day was perfect for this age old event as the sun was shining brightly and there was not a cloud in the sky. Sounding the call was Her Majesty's Royal Drum and Bugle Corps which serenaded the tourists with popular music as the changing of the guard was taking place. The music lent itself in making the royal occassion much more festive.

From the festive to the more serious I ventured to Westminster Abbey. All I can say is "Wow!" It certainly was quite an architectural achievement!

The Tower of London is still standing! Oh, what history transpired within

the halls of that castle! Would you believe that the castle had its "Watergate" too?

Of course, the "olde" restaurants certainly had more to offer than just good food. There was the Chelshire Cheese which is an "olde pub" dating to 1632 and "ye Olde Cock" which dates to the same era.

There were many museums, but I spent a great deal of time in the British Museum, which is near the University of London, the National Art Museum, near Trafalgar Square, and of course, Madame Tussands.

Now, Madame Tussands is no ordinary wax museum. Would you believe that I ran into Richard Burton and thinking it was a live man I said, "Excuse me, Sir!" Well, Mr. Burton just smiled and I was a trifle bit red with embarrassment! It goes without saying that there is quite a bit of realism in those wax creations!

Well, I thought I had lost my soul, again, in that museum, as it was frightening. Which brings me to my first soul shocking experience. Instead of leaving

my heart in San Francisco, I left my "soul" in the streets of London. 6

After a rather long day of walking about I was in a bit of a hurry to return to the hotel and clean up for dinner. Well, I followed the crowd which was ignoring the pedestrian light. So, here comes a car, I trip in a pot hole; I hear a crack and my next thought is "Ouch! (Expletives deleted, of course)!!" (The next day the London City Service asphalted over that blasted hole!) So I have a ball sized ankle, but in my mind, I am determined that the game must go on! and it did and it almost turned out to be a real "blast!"

On Saturday the seventeenth, I was planning to go to the Empire Ballroom. But before, I went to a movie. Well, after the movie, guess what? Compliments of a maniac, there was a bomb scare and a large portion of Piccadilly Circus had to be evacuated.

The climax of my visit was to attend a cabaret night at "The Talk of the Town." The performances were absolutely spectacular. Of course, it was rather expensive, but cost aside, it was a marvelous experience! Being single sometimes has its advantages

as I was seated with some members of the very wealthy set of American society. The couple and an older gentleman were travelling on a mission of purchasing concert companies. As an example, they were currently involved in the purchase of Henry Mancini's orchestra.

Well, they asked me a number of questions. One of particular interest was where I attended school. I said I had attended Wittenberg University and the older gentleman's eyes sits up. "Oh, I am very familiar with that school," he said. When I mentioned Papa's name, the man said, "yes, I believe I once met Don Pfeiffer. Was he not a trustee at Wittenberg University?" What a small world and I will be darned if I can remember the man's name!

I saw a number of motion pictures to include: Barry Lyndon, Jaws, The Return of the Pink Panther, Love and Death, and The Man Who Would Be King. Oh, it was marvelous to see such superlative motion pictures!

I should add that I took a day tour on the Thames River to

Greenwich where the infamous Cutty Sark is docked. So that is the ship on the bottle!

Finally, I performed a rather defiant act against royalty in England. I was walking home late one evening when I came upon the three gated arch near Buckingham Palace. The center gate was reserved for passage only by the sovereign. But, it was open! So, I looked to my left and to my right and then I defiantly walked through that center gate!

So, that was London! and now I am back in Fulda awaiting the frustrations that begin once again on Monday. At least now I can tackle the problems with renewed zest and vigor. Jolly good show!

Best Wishes!

Love,
David